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## ELEMENTARY ART TEACHING IN THE LABORATORY SCHOOL.

### I.

A STUDY of the relation of art to education leads at once to the question of ultimate aim. Should this aim be utilitarian, æsthetic, or ethical? The psychology of a creative experience in art would seem to solve the question, for it is self-evident that such an experience contains all three of these elements. The isolation of end is an idea which exists only in the highly developed consciousness of the theorist. The technical training which is necessary for an æsthetic creation does involve processes which are of value in helping the individual to deal with the general problems of life. If one is inclined to dwell upon the sense-training, power, and control of conditions incident to expression, he may conceive of the aim as utilitarian. The generative force, however, is either æsthetic or ethical. Therefore, this technical training is not an end in itself, but is dignified by the creative impulse which controls it. It seems necessary to state continually the fact that art is a unity, and that whenever either of its phases is unduly emphasized there is no real art experience. There are two extremes in instruction, both of which fail in maintaining this unity. One of these is uncontrolled self-expression; the other is a technical training so formal and unadjusted to the individual that it does not permit of any self-expression. The whole problem seems to be the development of the creative power, and along with it the technical facility which enables the individual to express himself adequately. This statement should not be understood as depreciating the value of stong draftsmanship or of the most thorough discipline in all that makes up the technique of art. It is intended to emphasize the point, however, that this is not enough. In evidence of this is the well-known fact that in the majority of cases the product of the academic system can reproduce only

what is before his eyes. This condition does not seem to arise from lack of subjective ability, but rather from the fact that academic methods have made it possible for a student to achieve a brilliant technique without acquiring any process by which he can draw from inner resources and give them concrete form. That the academies themselves recognize the weakness is evidenced by recent strenuous efforts to strengthen the work in composition. Owing to this condition, art does not today express that which is most vital in the life of the age, nor does it enter into the crafts as it has during all periods of great creative activity. It is only when the commonest things of life are honest, harmonious, and beautiful that art becomes the expression of a people. This can never be until instruction contains these two elements properly unified.

To obtain this unified end involves, on the language side, the question of how much technique is needed at the different stages of development, and of how to bring this to bear upon the individual. It involves, on the other side, the subject of interests and how to encourage the expression of these interests through the art medium. Otherwise stated, it is the problem of motive and content and form and method.

Since 1898, when art work was begun in the Laboratory School, experiments have been directly aimed toward the solution of these questions. The first point of approach would seem to be that of motive and subject-matter. Are the basic art impulses of different ages general enough to admit of classification? Do these impulses differ from those of the adult, and, if so, when do they become adult in character? How are interests affected by environment and school organization? The other side of this question is: At what age are æsthetic principles formulated from the adult standpoint to be presented?

The question of the fundamental source of the child's art impulses is a difficult and complex problem. The more experience one has with the living child, the more impossible it becomes to make any generalization. If one assumes the racial recapitulation, he meets the sophisticated instincts of inherited civilization. If he forces advanced standards upon him, the

primitive tendencies rise in contradiction to his theory. Any general classification must be too dogmatic, yet the questions which depend upon it demand a working basis of some kind. It is only on that ground that one is justified in assuming any phenomena as conclusive, and he must do so knowing that each individual is a protest against it, and in some particular an exception to the rule. During the first decade of life consciousness is limited, and the manifold interests of later years exist in an embryonic state, bound up in the few activities which constitute the primitive whole. In this whole there is not enough differentiation of interest to afford recognition of art aims as apart from the central motives of life. The premise stated that all real art expression is generated by an æsthetic or ethical motive. This expression may be no more than the girdle or clay bowl of the savage, but the instinct which prompted him to cover them with lines and colors, arranged in orderly manner, is the rudiment of the same impulse which produced Greek art. So the child certainly has a decorative interest, but it is amenable to no law but that of instinct. Drawing and modeling are not expressions of interest in processes, but of some thought or feeling emanating from this simple life-experience. The early experiences and impulses seem to be largely motor. The idea of form is gained first through touch rather than sight. The child who dramatizes an action for the class makes the best figure drawing. Man and animal in his world are always doing something. A line at the top of the paper for sky and one at the bottom for ground are universally the first expression of landscape. Investigation shows that this is the motor image of the distance between these two great planes.

One might describe this as a story-telling motive. It seems to begin with the first meaningless smudges—meaningless only to the adult, for the child interprets into them endless variety of events. Through the reaction of expression consciousness of visual truth is constantly increased. The interest gradually becomes more complex, being not only motor, but visual and technical. Generally speaking, this condition is apparent somewhere between the eighth and ninth years. There is a time

when there is evident desire to do a thing because it looks big and difficult, and because of pleasure in manipulation of a certain medium. The application of the objective standard to his work also stimulates a demand for a more accurate visual symbol. These complexities are apt to mislead. They may be considered as indications of the kind of technique needed, rather than as a change in controlling impulses. The group may at one time want to model a pet dog, at another to paint an attractive flower ; but if the teacher assumes that interests have become purely objective, and consciously æsthetic, a lethargic class will prove the mistake. Judging from actual experience, it is safe to say that up to twelve or thirteen years of age the creative stimulus is largely story-telling or decorative. A number of twelve-year-old students not interested in any form of technical work which would have been of benefit to them, and consequently disorganized, were transformed into a deeply earnest and enthusiastic class. The change occurred as soon as they undertook to produce a frieze for their history room. Paul Revere's Ride represented in nine panels, the composite work of the entire group, was the result of their three months' effort and stimulated them enough to restore normal conditions.

Between the ninth and fifteenth years there is a slow progress toward the adult art motive. There are no sudden transitions, but the mind gradually recognizes and enjoys form, line, and color as expressions, not of the story, but of the space art in which the aim is the expression of beauty. It is important for the educator to know when this transition takes place in the individual, and how to help it along. It is a difficult matter to determine. Evidences of natural taste are easily mistaken for conscious interest. The child himself is most reticent about his subjective life. Owing to the fact that, irrespective of age, young beginners seem to pass through the story-telling period, it is necessary to continue an experiment a number of years before acquiring any reliable facts. In making bas-reliefs representing incidents in the life of Marquette, a lesson in composition was appreciatively received by a nine-year-old class. It was subordinate, however, to the illustrative motive. In the tenth

year indications of the æsthetic interest are more numerous. There is a desire for neatness and finish, so that Japanese materials—ink and rice paper—have been used. Incidental to the designing of colonial furniture to be made in the shop, the idea of proportion developed. In these designs it was evident that growth in artistic feeling had taken place, though formulated æsthetic principles had never been presented to the children. The weaving which was carried on in a textile course afforded opportunity for design. They recognized this as a slightly separate element, but did not care to make a design unless the loom was warped and waiting.

From thirteen to fifteen the æsthetic principles, as formulated by Mr. Arthur Dow, were presented to the students.

Their interest in space art was quite as strong as the story-telling motive had been with the six-year-old class. In brief, when art instruction is properly unified, the creative motive always affords a stimulus. This creative motive begins in the decoration of hand-craft, and in story-telling in which the æsthetic element is an unconscious and instinctive manifestation. It gradually passes over into a differentiated art motive in which æsthetic impulses are experienced, and consciously expressed.

All organic growth must progress through a process of assimilation. Without the craving for food there is little possibility for proper nourishment. The efficiency of technical training depends, not only upon the teacher's organization of material, but upon the student's consciousness of need. It is only when the creative impulse causes the demand for art expression that technique can be converted into terms of experience. When this motive is at all times active, it is possible to develop a definite technical sequence, adjusted to the evolutionary stages of mind. Because it is only through the idealization of his own life-experiences that the individual can get an æsthetic training, it becomes necessary to develop subject-matter from those ideas and feelings which have taken most vital hold of consciousness. In the laboratory the history and social occupation afforded such stimulus, and consequently subject-matter grew out of these. Under other school organization the reading and life outside of the school afforded the strongest interest.

When work was first organized in the laboratory the ages ranged from six to eleven. The children belonged to a class which had seen art productions and formed high standards. The result was that a disgust for crude efforts created an aversion for the work. Lack of confidence began with the ninth year.

LILLIAN S. CUSHMAN.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
Laboratory School.

[*To be continued.*]